

FARM BILL

ARGUABLY ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT PIECES OF LEGISLATION AFFECTING FOOD SECURITY, NUTRITION AND PUBLIC HEALTH IN THE U.S., THE FARM BILL ALSO CAN BE ONE OF THE MOST CONFUSING. HERE ARE SOME GOOD-TO-KNOW DETAILS FOR UNDERSTANDING ITS IMPACT ON NUTRITION AND THE HEALTH OF AMERICANS. *by Liz Spiller*

Background Basics

- 1) It isn't actually named "the Farm Bill." In fact, the name changes every time it's reauthorized to reflect the issues it encompasses. The most recent version proposed is called the Agriculture Reform, Food and Jobs Act of 2012 (see timeline).
- 2) It is an omnibus law, meaning it addresses multiple issues, including farm assistance, land conservation, food security and nutrition education. While the original purpose of the legislation was to help farmers by increasing crop prices and controlling production, about 50 years ago it started including related issues and interests, such as nutrition supplementation and education programs.
- 3) Its reauthorization cycle is irregular — sometimes three years, sometimes five years — and its provisions are rarely set in stone. A new bill amends or suspends provisions of permanent law; reauthorizes, amends or repeals provisions of preceding bills; and adds new provisions for a limited time.
- 4) The committees responsible for hashing out farm bill details are the U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry and the U.S. House Committee on Agriculture.
- 5) It takes a simple majority to pass a farm bill in Congress (218 members of the House and 50 of the Senate). Once a bill passes in both chambers of Congress, it moves to the executive branch (the president).

FARM BILL CHAMPIONS



Sen. Debbie Stabenow (D-Mich.), chairwoman of the U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry



Sen. Thad Cochran (R-Miss.), ranking minority member of the U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry



Rep. Frank Lucas (R-Okla.), chairman of the House Committee on Agriculture



Rep. Collin Peterson (D-Minn.), ranking minority member of the House Committee on Agriculture

The 15 Titles of the Farm Bill

TITLE I: Commodities: provides income support to growers of select commodities, including wheat, corn and other feed grains, cotton, rice, oilseeds, peanuts, sugar and dairy.

TITLE II: Conservation: provides funding for farm environmental stewardship through programs that improve farm management practices, retire land and protect farmland and other natural resources.

TITLE III: Agricultural Trade and Food Aid: funds U.S. agriculture export and international food assistance programs and various World Trade Organization obligations.

TITLE IV: Nutrition: covers domestic food and nutrition and commodity distribution programs, such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance and Nutrition Education, as well as purchases of fresh fruit and vegetables in schools and expanded programs for farmers markets and urban gardens.

TITLE V: Farm Credit: offers direct and guaranteed loan programs to farmers via two government-related farm lenders, the USDA Farm Service Agency and the Farm Credit System.

TITLE VI: Rural Development: funds rural development loan and grant programs, the expansion of rural broadband access, and water infrastructure projects and promotes locally produced agricultural food products.

TITLE VII: Research: supports food, nutrition and agricultural research and extension programs, including bio-security and response, biotechnology and organic production.

TITLE VIII: Forestry: funds USDA Forest Service programs that protect forests from threats, restore forests damaged by natural disasters and enhance public benefits from private forests.

TITLE IX: Energy: supports the development of biofuel refineries and research and helps farmers, ranchers and rural small businesses purchase renewable energy systems.

TITLE X: Horticulture and Organic Agriculture: encourages the production and consumption of fruits, vegetables and nuts and supports organic agriculture.

Title XI: Livestock: addresses livestock disease prevention and food safety concerns and enhances electronic mandatory livestock reporting.

TITLE XII: Crop Insurance and Disaster Assistance: protects farmers from risks associated with adverse weather, weather-related plant diseases and insect infestations.

TITLE XIII: Commodity Futures: covers reauthorization of the Commodity Futures Trading Commission, an independent agency that regulates commodity futures trading in the U.S.

TITLE XIV: Miscellaneous: expands programs to assist limited-resource and socially disadvantaged farmers and addresses rural development, agricultural labor supply and animal welfare.

TITLE XV: Trade and Taxes: introduces numerous tax provisions affecting conservation and commodity programs, payments, timber investment, biofuel production and agricultural income.

Used with permission from the American Farmland Trust. Check out its "Farm Bill 101" primer on land conservation at [Farmland.org](http://farmland.org).

Farm Bills & Nutrition

1965	1970	1973	1977	1981	1985
Food and Agricultural Act of 1965: considered the first farm bill; provided for commodity programs for wheat, feed grains and cotton.	Agricultural Act of 1970: focused on commodities; no nutrition provisions.	Agricultural and Consumer Protection Act of 1973: authorized to buy commodities for feeding low-income mothers and young children; considered first omnibus farm bill.	Food and Agriculture Act of 1977: made USDA the lead agency for agriculture and extension programs; required research in the nutritive value of foods and human nutrition; established the Expanded Food and Nutrition Program to provide nutrition education to low-income households.	Agriculture and Food Act of 1981: allowed USDA secretary to create cooperative human nutrition centers; centralized nutrition research management; supported new nutrition education methods and techniques; extended Commodity Supplemental Food Program to the elderly.	Food Security Act of 1985: established the Food Stamp Nutrition Education Program; ensured that nutrition monitoring efforts included low-income populations; permitted non-profit grocery programs to help feed the hungry; authorized meta-analysis research on calcium and dietary cholesterol; required USDA to maintain nutrient database.

Data from the National Agricultural Law Center and the Congressional Research Service's *Agriculture: A Glossary of Terms, Programs, and Laws*, 2005 edition.

Nutrition Provisions

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (formerly Food Stamps) establishes a basic safety net by providing monthly benefits to eligible low-income families to enable them to purchase food and alleviate hunger and malnutrition. The farm bill establishes who is eligible for SNAP and addresses program access, benefit levels and other issues. And for every \$5 in SNAP benefits, \$9 goes into the local economy.

The SNAP-Ed program is the education component that empowers SNAP participants to make healthy food choices within a limited budget and choose physically active lifestyles consistent with the current *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* and MyPlate. SNAP-Ed offers innovative and creative ways to engage participants to eat more fruits and vegetables, whole grains and fat-free or low-fat milk products while being physically active and maintaining healthy habits at all ages.

The Community Supplemental Food Programs provide nutritious USDA foods to improve the health of low-income pregnant women and new mothers, infants, children up to age 6 and elderly people at least 60 years old.

The Emergency Food Assistance Program is designed to meet the short-term, emergency food needs of low-income Americans. The state agencies that manage the program allocate food to church pantries, food banks, soup kitchens, emergency shelters and Community Action Agencies, which distribute it directly to people in need or use it to prepare meals.

Fighting for Food Security and Nutrition Education

Congress has until September 30 to reauthorize the farm bill. On January 23, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid reintroduced Agriculture Reform, Food and Jobs Act of 2012 as one of the several "privileged, top-priority bills," and the upcoming weeks and months will be critical.

- Keep your eyes peeled for Action Alerts in your inbox, an easy way for Academy members to send a message of farm bill support via fax, phone or online to their elected officials. And look for updates in the Academy's e-newsletter, *Eat Right Weekly*.
- Follow the issues on Twitter (@EatrightPIA) and Facebook (facebook.com/eatrightANDPAC).
- Contact your state affiliate public policy coordinator to get involved in advocating for the passage of a farm bill that strengthens and protects food and nutrition programs.

Tell Representatives and Senators a Smart Farm Bill Will:

1. Fund SNAP-Ed.
2. Maintain the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable program.
3. Support The Emergency Food Assistance Program.
4. Help families and the local economy.
5. Fully fund nutrition research.

2012

Agriculture Reform, Food and Jobs Act of 2012: Although a comprehensive bill passed in the Senate last June, disagreements over cuts to nutrition programs stalled it in the House of Representatives and the bill was never brought to a vote. The farm bill was "extended without reauthorization" as part of Congress' last-minute sequestration deal — a deal that also slashed SNAP-Ed funding for 2013 by 28 percent.

1990

1996

2002

2008

Food, Agriculture, Conservation, and Trade Act of 1990: included new titles on rural development, forestry and organic certification; extended Food Stamp Program and other domestic nutrition programs.

Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform Act of 1996: reauthorized the Food Stamp Program

Food Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002: extended all nutrition research and education programs; established the Fruit and Vegetable Pilot Program; established WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program with mandatory funding

Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008: renamed Food Stamp to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program; authorized research on incentivizing SNAP participants to choose healthy foods; created the National Institute for Food and Agriculture to coordinate research and extension programs

